

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY JAIL AND HONOR FARM

The San Luis Obispo County Jail is located off Highway 1 and Kansas Ave. in the county services complex. The honor farm is on the same property a short distance south of the jail. The jail is under the supervision of the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Department and houses sentenced inmates convicted of misdemeanors and felonies, unsentenced inmates awaiting trial, and others who have been convicted of felonies and are awaiting transfer to a state prison facility.

ORIGIN

The Grand Jury is mandated to inspect the jails and prisons within the county.

AUTHORITY

California Penal Code §919 (b) states: "The grand jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county.

METHOD

Members of the Grand Jury toured the jail on October 17, 2005, and the honor farm on November 15, 2005. We were given ample opportunity to ask questions of the Sheriff's personnel, and were provided with various forms, fact sheets, and other statistical data about the facility.

NARRATIVE

Two correctional lieutenants, well versed in the day-to-day operations of the jail, conducted our tour on October 17, 2005. We toured a new wing in the men's jail, which contained state-of-the-art monitoring equipment. An older section consisting of cells housing four to six prisoners each was full at the time of our visit. Exercise areas were spacious and well cared for.

In the women's section we observed sack lunches being served. We also saw several mattresses on the floor where some inmates are assigned to sleep because of the lack of bedspace.

The jail is inspected biennially by the Correctional Standards Authority (CSA), an organization formerly called the State Board of Corrections. The CSA also rates the jail's capacity according to factors such as square footage, number of sinks, showers, and toilets available, and other criteria.

The rated capacity of the men's jail, according to the CSA, is 412 for the jail proper and 63 for the honor farm. The actual capacities (number of beds in place) are 451 and 80, respectively. There are also barracks for men serving weekend sentences which contain an additional 80 beds.

The CSA rated capacity for the women's jail is 43, and the actual capacity (number of beds in place) is 76. The average daily population in 2005 was 81.

When the population of either the men's or women's jail exceeds the actual capacity, inmates sleep on mattresses placed on the floor. Consistent overcrowding has made floor-sleeping an every-day occurrence at both facilities.

Overcrowding continues to be particularly acute in the women's section of the jail. Past grand juries have noted this problem, most recently the 2004-2005 Grand Jury which included in its recommendations new construction to expand the women's section. But progress has been inordinately slow. Funds for design work were allocated in the 1999-2000 county budget, and several architectural firms are being considered for the final design of the project. However, no funds have been budgeted for actual construction.

Our tour of the honor farm took place on November 15, 2005 when we were accompanied by a correctional sergeant who oversees the daily activities of inmates housed there. Inmates selected for the honor farm are considered low-risk for both violent behavior and escape tendencies.

Food for the total jail population is prepared at the honor farm by inmates under the supervision of professional food service employees. It should be noted that an inspection in November 2005, by the San Luis Obispo County Health Department concluded that the jail met or exceeded the standards for food preparation and handling, sanitation, and nutritional requirements. The

inspector mentioned that the facility "...is very clean and well-maintained." Grand jurors reviewed menus for a six-week period and they appeared varied, appetizing, and adequate in both quantity and nutritional content. The cost for food service at the jail is approximately \$1.50 per day, per inmate.

Honor farm inmates also do all of the jail's laundry, farm a small vegetable garden which supplements the food supply, maintain the landscaping around the complex, perform maintenance at the county animal shelter, and repair and refurbish used bicycles which are given to needy children.

Medical care at the jail is provided by four physicians, two psychiatrists and three dentists, all of whom work part-time at the facility. The medical staff also includes a supervising registered nurse, ten registered nurses, and three licensed vocational nurses, along with a mental health coordinator and two mental health therapists. If an inmate requires medical services unavailable at the jail, he or she is transported to a local hospital for treatment.

Drug and alcohol abuse histories are very common among jail inmates, with methamphetamine addiction being the most serious problem. Substance abuse counseling is available, and Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings are held on a regular basis.

An estimated 20 to 27 percent of the inmates are considered seriously mentally ill, and the cost of psychiatric medications is expected to exceed \$100,000 for the current year. Society would be better served if many of the mentally ill inmates were in proper treatment facilities, but such alternatives are not available. Moreover, this problem exists in virtually all jail and prison systems.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the jail appears to be an efficient and well-managed facility staffed by conscientious and motivated professionals. This opinion is shared by those bodies which regularly inspect the jail to insure compliance with legal mandates. The only negative aspect of its operations relates to

the overcrowding issue, about which neither the Sheriff nor his staff can do anything but request funding for needed expansion.

FINDING

The jail is overcrowded, particularly in the women's section, where inmates sleeping on mattresses placed on the floor is a daily occurrence. Plans to expand the women's section appear to have stalled at the design stage for which funds were allotted several years ago.

RECOMMENDATION

The Board of Supervisors should place a high priority on funding the expansion of the women's jail, and construction should begin as soon as possible.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

- ø **The San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Department, Due 08/30/06 (Finding and Recommendation)**
- ø **The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors, Due 09/30/06 (Finding and Recommendation)**